

Institution: Lancaster University		
Unit of Assessment: 21, Sociology		
Title of case study: Improving the health and welfare of mothers and their children in the child protection system through 'maternal commons': the <i>New Beginnings</i> programme		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008 to 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Imogen Tyler Jadwiga Leigh	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor Senior Lecturer	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: September 1998 to present April 2019 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: May 2019 to December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact Research by Tyler and Leigh has introduced an innovative model of social work practice called <i>New Beginnings</i>, which works with parents in the child protection system who are at risk of having their children removed due to concerns of neglect or abuse. This programme of work has effected transformational change for 26 vulnerable families in Stockport, a large town in the North West of England. Key impacts include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Social welfare improvements for mothers and children, through reducing or ending child protection interventions for 26 families (55 children) b) Transformative mental health and emotional well-being benefits for families, through 'maternal commons' peer support c) Financial savings of an estimated GBP670,943 to the public purse, improved employability and participation in education d) Improving professional practice in the social work community: enhancing the education, training and skills of support workers and social workers e) Changing perceptions of women who have experienced the care system <p>Children, parents, social care service providers, a local authority (social care, housing, health, schools), the criminal justice system and taxpayers are all beneficiaries of the impact.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research Since 2000, Tyler has undertaken an extensive programme of research on stigma, power and inequalities. Her influential monograph <i>Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain</i> (2013) [R5], has demonstrated how working-class communities are affected by austerity cuts to state welfare. From this body of research evidence, Tyler has developed a ground-breaking theoretical account of stigma as a form of power which classifies and divides communities, and reproduces inequalities of health, wealth and opportunity [R1-R5]. Tyler's work with welfare recipients and working-class mothers specifically informed the <i>New Beginnings</i> project. Her research [G1-G4] underpinned the initial design of that programme, as it provided a theoretical understanding of how the mothers' own adverse childhood experiences become entangled with the stigma associated with working class women who are known to social services.</p> <p>Tyler's research has focused on the ways in which marginalised, minoritised and/or underprivileged mothers have historically been the focus of social stigma. Her research has examined how moral judgements about women's fitness to parent have been used to justify government policies and practices in areas such as welfare, health and social care. These findings led her to develop the concept of the 'maternal commons' to explicate how women in multiple contexts, share experience, expertise and resources to resist shame, blame and oppressive forms of social control [R1-R5].</p> <p>Drawing on Tyler's research, Leigh recognised that women who had become subject to child protection interventions had often been classified by social workers as 'failing mothers', as the majority had originated from disadvantaged backgrounds and were faced with numerous different social, emotional, environmental and health related challenges that impeded their</p>		

ability to parent well. The research provided insights into how the women could work collectively in their 'maternal commons' to rework and resist the stigma power they had encountered from social welfare professionals. These insights enabled *New Beginnings* to develop from a small pilot project managed by Leigh in her previous HEI (2018), which sought to meet the individual needs of mothers who had suffered trauma, into a larger social action programme which enabled women in the child protection system to connect to one another and share their experiences and challenges (the application of the 'maternal commons'). Leigh used her Winston Churchill Fellowship [G5] to further research alternative models of peer support intervention in Australia in order that *New Beginnings* maternal commons could develop.

The new innovative model of social work practice developed in the *New Beginnings* programme is distinct from existing local authority provision because it prioritises peer-to-peer support systems, and community formation: the 'maternal commons' approach. It is also distinct from other mutual maternal help services (such as Home Start) because it focuses directly on women already involved in the child protection system who are generally excluded from such provision.

3. References to the research

- [R1] Tyler, I and Baraitser, L. (2013) 'Private View, Public Birth: Making Feminist Sense of the New Visual Culture of Childbirth'. *Studies in the Maternal* 5(2), 1-27. Peer-reviewed [supported by G1]. pdf is available on request.
- [R2] Tyler, I. (2008) "'Chav Mum, Chav Scum': class disgust in contemporary Britain'. *Feminist Media Studies* 8(1), 17-34. Peer-reviewed [supported by G2]. 426 citations SCOPUS, August 2020. pdf is available on request.
- [R3] Tyler, I. (2010) 'Designed to fail: A biopolitics of British citizenship'. *Citizenship Studies*, 14:1, 61-74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621020903466357> Peer-reviewed [supported by G3]. 96 citations SCOPUS, August 2020.
- [R4] Tyler, I. (2013) 'Naked Protest: the maternal politics of citizenship and revolt'. *Citizenship Studies* 17:2, 211-226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2013.780742> Peer-reviewed [supported by G4]. 25 citations SCOPUS, August 2020.
- [R5] Tyler, I. (2013) *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. London: Zed. Held at Lancaster University. Shortlisted for two prestigious prizes: the Bread and Roses Award for Radical Publishing and the BSA Philip Abrams Memorial Prize for the best first and sole-authored book within the discipline of Sociology, and widely reviewed and adopted, *Revolting Subjects* has had a significant impact on sociology, social policy and social work education [supported by G1].
- [R6] Leigh, J. & Wilson, S. (2020) 'Sylvia's Story: Time, Liminal Space and the Maternal Commons'. *Qualitative Social Work*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325020915777> [supported by G5].

Peer-reviewed research grants:

- [G1] Tyler (PI), *Revolting Subjects: Marginalisation and Resistance*, Leverhulme Fellowship (2010 to 2011) GBP45,000.
- [G2] Tyler (PI), *Hard Labour: The Cultural Politics of Reproduction*, Institute for Advanced Studies, Lancaster University (2005-2007) GBP2,000.
- [G3] Tyler (CI) *European Patient Organisations in in the Knowledge Society (EPOKS)*, Lancaster based work package concerned with histories and practices of childbirth activism organisations in the UK, European Commission Framework 7 Programme (2009-2012), Project ID 230307, GBP150,000.
- [G4] Tyler (CI) *Making Asylum Seekers Legible and Visible: An Analysis of the Dilemmas and Mitigating Strategies of Asylum Advocacy Organisations in the UK and US*, ESRC Small Grant (2010-2012) GBP64,896. Unanimous end-of-award evaluation score of 'outstanding': 'research of the highest international quality and impact' with 'clear evidence of impact on policy and practice'. [RES-000-22-3928-A].
- [G5] Leigh (PI), *Learning from trauma informed services after the National Apology*, Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship: (2019) GBP10,000.

4. Details of the impact

New Beginnings is an intensive community-oriented programme underpinned by Tyler's 'maternal commons' approach and was designed to work with parents of children on care orders, or whose children are subject to the child protection process. The programme lasts for 24 weeks and explores how past traumas have affected participants' identities and impacted upon their parenting practices; it provides space to share experiences, peer mentoring, therapeutic and practical support for mothers who have mental health problems, addiction issues, housing and welfare and benefit challenges [S1]. By December 2020, 26 mothers had completed the *New Beginnings* programme and due to its notable success, further funding of £201,476 has been invested by the National Lottery, Forever Manchester Fund, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) and Stockport Local Community Fund, allowing it to continue and expand.

a) Social welfare improvements for families through reduced protection interventions

The *New Beginnings* programme informs all participants of their rights in the child protection system and empowers them to successfully navigate that system. Of the 26 mothers who have completed *New Beginnings* to date, 92% have remained with and/or been reunited with their children and are no longer part of the child protection system or pre-court proceedings processes [S9]. As noted by a parenting consultant, at the programme's outset, *"only 3 women were not involved with social care at a child protection level"* [S3] and 4 of these mothers were in court proceedings when they joined the programme but have now had their children returned to their care. The Director of Operations (DofO) at Stockport Family, part of Stockport MBC, testified: *"Most parents who have completed the programme have moved down the tiers of intervention from statutory services and in many cases no longer have the involvement of social workers in their lives"* [S4].

Social care intervention has reduced, or has ended, because professionals have reported significant changes in participant's parenting abilities, in their confidence, and in dealing with problems such as drugs and alcohol, troubled relationships with male partners and wider family issues. The DofO at Stockport Family continues: *"New Beginnings is demonstrating real impact and improvement in family functioning and parental wellbeing....Some parents have successfully had children returned to their care, where previously there was no plan for this"* [S4]. In an independent evaluation of *New Beginnings* by NIHR, Quest Research and Evaluation and King's College London (2020), mothers stated they have felt more socially included and have a better understanding of their legal rights [S1] since joining the programme. It also helped the mothers to reflect on what could have been without the support they received. One mother said: *"If it wasn't for New Beginnings I wouldn't have got my children back and I would be dead - it's as simple as that"* [S2].

Society Inc., a CIO charity based in Salford, Greater Manchester, facilitates mentoring and peer support to clients with complex lifestyles across Salford, including addiction and criminal behaviour. Partnering with *New Beginnings*, their Strategic Lead said: *"The peer mentors are able to safely use their own stories to empower and motivate the women on the group....Story telling in recovery helps to reduce stigma, break communication barriers and also can be an empowering platform and catalyst for positive change"* [S5]. Although Covid-19 has delayed the expansion of services, Society Inc. and *New Beginnings* have firm plans to expand the provision across Blackburn and into other regions of Greater Manchester [S5].

b) Transformative mental health and emotional well-being benefits for mothers and children, through 'maternal commons' peer support

Participants particularly enjoyed weekly group sessions, the 'maternal commons', facilitated by Leigh, which allowed them to meet and connect with other mothers. All 26 mothers said that being in the 'group' reduced their feelings of stigma and isolation as they built relationships with other mothers going through similar experiences [S5], and 100% of mothers reported an improvement in their emotional well-being through peer mentoring and counselling [S9]. One mother said: *"The girls on New Beginnings are special. I want to be there for them when they're having a hard time because none of this is easy. We aren't here"*

because life has been easy" [R6: p454]. All participants benefitted from the 1:1 support provided by the peer mentors and this improved the way they responded to their children and their social workers. One mother said: *"[My peer mentor] gets it because she has been there and got the t-shirt. She doesn't mess, she says it how it is and I like that"* [S2 (cell Ref: N16)].

Peer mentors also reported a sense of pride and achievement once they completed the programme and the training. By December 2020, 35% of mothers had completed training to become peer mentors, with a further 6 parents to follow in 2021: *New Beginnings* gave them purpose. One said: *"I have two arteries that feed my heart with oxygen but what keeps my blood flowing is New Beginnings - it is the family I never had"* [S2 (cell ref:H8)]. As a result of engaging in peer supported group work and 1:1 sessions, all participants became more aware of mental health and welfare issues *"Learning to be at peace with myself and accepting my past has made me more capable of handling my future"* [R6; S2 (cell ref:C15); S3].

Mothers also had weekly sessions with the *New Beginnings* counsellor and drugs worker, which enabled them to regulate their emotions and reduce drug/alcohol usage [R6, S3, S5]. 85% of 14 participants who had drug dependency issues at the outset of the programme reduced their drug use, whilst all 14 women with alcohol dependency at the outset reduced their usage [S9]. Further, as a result of engaging in peer supported group work and 1:1 sessions with their peer mentor and keyworker, participants were more aware of mental health and welfare issues [R6, S2, S3]. 100% of mother in the programme considered that this knowledge and insight led to improved well-being for their children [S9 (col BT)].

c) Economic benefits; cost-savings, employability and improved education

New Beginnings has achieved its goal of keeping families together, and consequently, the costs of foster care and legal proceedings have been avoided [S3, S4]. A recent cost benefit analysis carried out by Greater Manchester Combined Authority estimated that *New Beginnings* produced a fiscal return of 6.13, and saved the public purse GBP670,943 in the financial year 2019-20. Therefore for every GBP1 invested in the programme, the public purse saved GBP6.13 in costs resulting from wider multi agency services in Stockport that would otherwise have been involved (e.g., police, housing provision, legal aid, mental health, drugs and alcohol services, education, etc.) [S6].

100% of participants who completed the programme have accessed other opportunities such as employment and education. One parent who is due to start further education reported: *"That would not have been something I would have ever thought about but New Beginnings has helped to change me"* [S1 (p14)]. 38% of mothers who participated in *New Beginnings* are now in employment, which has left them feeling a sense of pride and personal achievement; as a result the families have experienced the benefit of increased family income [S2]. This contrasts strongly with the situation at the outset of the programme when only one parent was in work [S3]. Further, of the 17 mothers with children experiencing truancy problems at the outset of the programme, 94% reported a marked improvement after completion. 100% of mothers who had been confronting issues around their children's exclusion from education also reported positive change [S9].

d) Improving professional practice in the social work community: enhancing education, training and skills

New Beginnings has improved the professional practice of local authority workers, seconded to the programme by Stockport MBC since 2019 to advocate and repair previously hostile relationships between participants and social welfare professionals. They have rethought the way they work with families, with one member of staff saying that working on *"New Beginnings has made me think outside of the box, by trying something different and working with parents not against them"* [within S11]. The way participants responded to their social works also improved: *"I didn't trust anyone before New Beginnings but that's changed and me and my social worker have a good relationship now"* [S2 (cell ref G9)].

Training amongst professionals has been enhanced since *New Beginnings* was cited as an inspirational example of good practice in 'Working Towards Accreditation: Putting the Pieces Together' (Maclean S, 2019), a workbook which supports social workers in gaining professional qualifications through the National Assessment and Accreditation System [S11]. To the end of December 2020, 1500 copies had been sold. Further professionals have been reached through the programme's peer mentors delivering keynotes on 'maternal commons' at professional conferences, lectures and training workshops, influencing positive changes in practice and resonating with regulators' 'Expert by Experience' movement. Feedback from a conference presented by a parent from *New Beginnings* at the Policy Institute, Kings College in London in 2020, attended mainly by lawyers, social workers and academics, saw a delegate asking "why is this [*New Beginnings*] not standard practice in such cases?" [S10].

e) Challenging perceptions of women who have experienced the care system

Parents repeatedly stressed that stigma had arisen as a result of their experiences with the care system. Upon graduating from *New Beginnings*, participants' artwork was publicly displayed in the 'Face the Feeling' exhibition, hosted by The People's Museum in Manchester in 2019. The exhibition received approximately 20,370 visitors and celebrated participants' achievements whilst challenging public perceptions. The Exhibitions Officer stated that "*The artwork and materials exhibited.... provoked discussion and debate among visitors*", creating a very positive response to the display [S8]. A visitor commented "*I had never thought that mothers stuck in a cycle of deprivation could be supported to turn their lives around. I will never judge them again*" [S7 (cell ref: D2)]. Parents also shared their stories by publishing blogs on the New Beginnings website (2,985 views by December 2020). One blog, entitled 'Ordinary Magic and the New Beginnings Maternal Commons', about a mother whose child returned to her care received 534 views; she said: "*To think that my story is having an impact on social work practice is mad. I never would have thought this could happen to me. I am so proud*" [S2 (cell ref:H16)].

Summary

A parenting consultant with experience of the project emphasised the importance of the 'maternal commons' approach and *New Beginnings* "*if we are to prevent another generation of children experiencing the abuse and trauma which has been the lived experience of this vulnerable group of women*" [S3]. Due to the powerful impact and success of the programme, further funding has been secured which will enable the programme to expand. Moreover, the principles it embodies "*of authentic collaboration, advocacy and relationship-based practice in a way that supports vulnerable women to feel held and heard*" [S3] are being increasingly replicated by Stockport MBC and other agencies. *New Beginnings'* legacy is the hope for the future, inspired amongst the families it supports. In the words of one parent: "*I've learned that when one door closes another opens that is better. New Beginnings is that other door*" [S2 (cell ref D20)].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [S1] Evaluation Report of the New Beginnings Maternal Commons, 2020
- [S2] End of programme evaluation feedback completed by parents, 2019 & 2020
- [S3] Testimony from Registered Nurse, Health Visitor & Parenting Consultant, 2020
- [S4] Testimony from Director of Operations at Stockport Family, 2020
- [S5] Testimony from Chief Executive Officer of Society Inc, 2020
- [S6] Outcome Data and Cost Benefit Analysis Spreadsheet, ratified by Stockport MBC, part of Greater Manchester Combined Authority, p10. 2019
- [S7] Visitor feedback (Face the Feeling Exhibition, People's History Museum, 2019)
- [S8] Testimony from Exhibitions Officer at People's History Museum, 2020
- [S9] Outcome data from New Beginnings used to inform Cost Benefit Analysis, ratified by Stockport Local Authority; a summary can be found in the S9 addendum, 2020.
- [S10] Feedback from NIHR Health and Social Care Workforce Research Unit in the Policy Institute at King's College London, 2020
- [S11] ['Working Towards Accreditation: Putting the Pieces Together'](#) Maclean S, 2019